

LOST GAUGE

Federal Express Loses Track of a Nuclear Gauge

An Agricultural Research Service employee used Federal Express (a common method of shipping gauges and other small sources of radioactive material) to return a nuclear gauge to CPN, a gauge manufacturer in California. The gauge was in its carrying case, a suitcase-like container with a handle. He was unable to tape the shipping papers to the case but the FedEx agent assured him that FedEx would take care of it.

CPN contacted him 2 days later when the gauge did not arrive on time. FedEx informed the ARS employee that the gauge-case handle (with shipping papers attached) was discovered in a local FedEx facility but they did not know where (the rest of) the gauge was. The ARS employee waited 4 days while FedEx tried but could not

locate the gauge. He then called Dan Sharp at RSS to explain the situation. Dan contacted the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to report the lost gauge. The NRC emphasized that USDA must do everything it could to try and find the gauge.



FedEx told Dan they were still looking for the gauge. Since the gauge was manufactured by and labeled with Troxler information, Dan called Troxler to find out whether anyone tried to ship it there or contact them about the gauge. A Troxler representative told Dan that someone from FedEx called about a package in the FedEx hazardous material warehouse that was missing a handle. Dan was able to confirm that this was the missing ARS gauge and he arranged for its shipment to CPN. Dan also determined that the handle was sheared off the gauge because the gauge was placed on a conveyor system that FedEx said is not to be used when handling hazardous materials.

Lessons Learned:

1. If you are worried that the package isn't properly labeled, it probably isn't; contact RSS before you ship it.
2. Contact RSS immediately when you realize radioactive material is lost. We will help you recover the lost radioactive material and notify appropriate regulatory agencies.

On-Line Information System Update

Our contractor began programming the database that will support the prototype developed by RSS and the USDA team of radioactive material users. The timeframe for completing the database is 6 months and the on-line system will be ready for field use 2 or 3 months later. This system will handle more than 90% of all the records, information, communications, and guidance materials needed for the USDA radiation safety program. We are looking forward to making the interface with our office easier, faster, and more reliable.

Radioactive Waste Burial Site Excavation Update (Ames, Iowa)



In November 2002, Cabrera Services, an environmental remediation contractor based in Connecticut, excavated 16 pits containing radioactive waste at the Agricultural Research Service Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. From 1970 to 1980, vials containing small amounts of radioactive hydrogen, carbon, sulfur, and phosphorus mixed with small volumes of toluene and other volatile organic compounds were buried there. They also buried laboratory trash slightly contaminated with the same radioactive material. A total of about 40 cubic yards of waste was buried. This was an approved waste disposal method until NRC rescinded the approval in 1981.

The excavation and waste removal process was drastically changed when it was discovered that the waste was buried deeper than records indicated and ground water had seeped into the pits. The waste could not be removed by hand but had to be bulk excavated by machine. This tripled the waste
Rad Waste Site contd.

volume and increased the project cost by 50%. Fortunately, all of the waste has been removed and soil and groundwater sampling indicate that contamination levels are non-existent or well below harmful levels. Additional funding to properly dispose of all of the waste at a licensed facility has recently been obtained and the project should be completed (and the site released for unrestricted use) in the next few months.

REMINDER

If you are still faxing your RAD orders to the Radiation Safety Staff office, please be sure to send a fax coversheet with your request. Include the name and telephone number of the individual our staff should contact if we encounter any problems processing the order. Please also include instructions regarding whether or not RSS

Welcome

Please join us in welcoming Leta Cullinane to the Radiation Safety Staff. Leta is a Program Assistant, processing purchase orders for radioactive material, entering data, and maintaining radiation safety records files. Leta is new to the Federal Government and is already an important part of our operation.

We are also welcoming James Terry, Health Physicist, to RSS. He is just getting started in his role supporting radioactive material users throughout USDA. Jim brings more than 25 years of experience in Health Physics with the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Reminder contd.
should forward your order to the vendor or if your Purchasing Office will place the order.

How to Contact the Radiation Safety Staff

Web Site:
www.rss.usda.gov
Phone Number:
301-504-2440
Fax Number:
301-504-2450

Mailing Address:
USDA
Radiation Safety Staff
5601 Sunnyside Avenue
Mail Stop 5510
Beltsville, MD 20705